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INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAHNA/FAA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000184

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C, IO/T AND EB/TRA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2016  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BE](#) [KY](#) [RW](#)  
SUBJECT: GOR GROUNDS SN BRUSSELS PASSANGER PLANE

Classified By: Political Officer G Learned. Reason 1.4 (d)

11. (U) On 21 February the Rwandan Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) grounded an SN Brussels Airlines passenger plane for violating safety standards. Flight 463, from Kigali to Brussels with one stop in Nairobi, had over 200 passengers, including at least two Amcits. The CAA claimed:  
-- The safety belts in the cockpit did not have an inspection date properly displayed; and  
-- The plane was leaking fluid.  
SN Brussels has reported to the Belgian Embassy that the infractions were minor and were all addressed and resolved immediately after the CAA made the citations. An SN Brussels representative in Kigali has stated that several meetings were scheduled with the CAA president to resolve the issues but CAA officials consistently showed up several hours late to the meetings and said that the problems were under review without offering a timeline for resolution.

12. (C) According to the Belgian poloff on 24 February, there has been regular contact between the Belgian Ambassador and Foreign Minister Murigande since the incident began. Additionally, the pressure from Brussels has escalated with calls from the Belgian Foreign Ministry on 22 and 23 February and a call from the Belgian Prime Minister to FM Murigande on 23 February. According to the Belgian DATT, a scheduled visit by the Belgian Defense Minister to Rwanda was canceled on February 24 due directly to this incident.

13. (C) The Belgians are adamant that there are no technical problems with the plane and suspect the reason for the grounding is a tit-for-tat move in response to a Belgian Aviation Authority decision in August 2005 barring a Rwandan-based Silverback Airlines cargo flight from departing Brussels due to technical problems with the aircraft. (Note. Belgian poloff did not know who owns Silverback Airlines. End note.)

14. (U) The next SN Brussels flight from Brussels to Kigali is due to arrive in Kigali on 25 February. If this incident has not been resolved by then, Belgian officials are predicting that the flight would land in Nairobi and not continue on to Rwanda. Passengers booked through to Kigali would need to debark and take another flight. It is unclear how this would be handled administratively.

14. (C) Comment. Belgian Emboffs report that the level of frustration in Brussels is high and that, in addition to the cancellation of the Defense Minister's trip, repercussions may include an EU or Belgian demarche protesting the handling of the issue by the GOR. It is unclear why the GOR would continue to take a hard line on this issue as the reasons given for grounding the plane do not appear to further

Rwanda's interests and seemingly outweigh any positive  
benefits to the GOR.  
ARIETTI